CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter the major findings of this study are reported. The implications of these findings for educational policy are also discussed. Finally the limitations of this piece of research are indicated and on the basis of which suggestions are made for further research.

5.1. MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings arrived at from the analysis of data are summarized as follows.

1. In the patriarchal society that we have women, in general, do not have lower access only to higher education in liberal arts but even to the higher secondary stage. However, they appear to have access equal to that of men to professional and post-graduate education. This situation is caused by the economic conditions as the poorer families which are forced to make a choice between sons and daughters give preference to sons while the well to do not mind their daughters continuing to remain in the education system longer as in this class higher educational attainments of girls brighten their marriage prospects. It must also be noted that the majority of women respondents, especially of rural origin, who have acquired a professional graduation have actually taken a degree in teaching (B.Ed) and very few of them have studied technical courses like engineering, medicine, law, etc.

2. Rural population has considerably lower access to higher education than its urban counterpart. In this respect rural women are worst off, as they have lower access not only than only the urban women but also than the rural men. Rural residents do not have lower access only to higher education than their urban counterparts; they have a disadvantage even in access to occupationally more potent subject streams of science and commerce. Again, rural women are the worst off in this respect because they appear to have very low levels of participation in the study of science subjects. However, it is interesting to note that urban women have greater access to science stream than not only rural men and women but also somewhat greater than urban men.

3. Religion appears to be related to the extent of access to higher education. From among the Hindus, the majority community, smaller proportions pass out from the
higher secondary school compared to the minority communities of Muslims and Christians, when these proportions are compared to their respective proportions in the population. But among those who pass out from the higher secondary school Hindus send the largest proportions to colleges and universities, and the Muslims send the smallest while the Christians remain in between. In other words among the higher secondary graduates who discontinue their education after this stage Hindus form the smallest proportion and Muslims the largest while Christians are in between. Again, while Hindus have the greatest access to professional education, Muslims have the lowest. In this respect Muslim women are the worst off while Christian women are only slightly better-off than them. Muslim women have lowest access not only to higher education in general but also to occupationally potential stream of science in particular.

4. When the proportions of higher secondary school graduates from different social categories are compared to their respective proportions in the population it is found the weaker sections viz. OBC/MOBC and SC’s are over represented while the ST’s and General categories are underrepresented. But the proportions of these school graduates entering colleges and universities shows that the General category predominates followed by OBC/MOBC and ST’s, while the SC categories sends the smallest proportion of its higher secondary school graduates to colleges and universities.

In the case of professional higher education it is the OBC/MOBC’s who send the largest proportion for such education while SC’s send the lowest and other categories being in between. However most of the professional graduates among the OBC/MOBC’s, especially among women, have acquired only degree in teaching (B.Ed) and not degrees in medicine, engineering, law etc. In this regard among the men ST’s dominated while among the women it was OBC/MOBC who dominated. SC and ST women had practically no access to professional higher education. Again SC, ST and OBC/MOBC, have a great disadvantage in access to occupationally potent stream of science and this disadvantage is greater in the case of women than men and SC’ women are conspicuous by their absence in science stream and professional higher education.

5. Father’s educational attainment is a strong determinant of a persons’ access to higher education. The children of fathers with less than a high school education
have very few chances of acquiring higher education and if at all they have any chances it is only to acquire a first degree in liberal arts, while the children of fathers’ with a graduation and above especially the children of professional graduates and postgraduates have the greatest access to professional graduation and post graduation. This is true in the case of both men and women. However, it is seen that father’s illiteracy is a little greater hindrance in higher education of a son than that of a daughter. This appears to be so because the illiterate fathers are in very low income occupations and therefore force their sons into work to supplement the family income while daughters somehow continue because they do not find the kind of work they are able to do or are allowed to do, and because of the special support women get from state government.

Father’s educational attainments also affect the children’s choice of streams of study. The children of fathers with less than a middle school education are very unlikely to study science, the occupationally potent stream, while the children of fathers with a professional graduation and a post graduation are very unlikely to study arts stream which has very low employment potential except in cases where the parents want their children to compete for higher administrative service like IAS or state Administrative Service.

6. Like fathers’ education mothers’ education is also a strong determinant of children’s access to higher education. Mother’s higher education especially enhances a daughter’s access to higher education more than that of a son’s. Again, illiteracy of mother is a greater hindrance in a daughter’s access to higher education than that in a son’s. Higher educational attainments of mother also brighten the children’s chances of studying science. Here again, it enhances a daughter’s chances to a greater extent than that of a son’s.

7. This study shows that it is not only the parents’ educational attainments that determine the children’s access to higher education, but the children’s chances of acquiring higher education are brightened under the influence of any other member of the family who has the highest educational attainments in the family even if the parents have low attainments. This explains why children of some illiterate parents have also acquired higher education. Such children have done so because there is some other member who has had higher educational attainments. Again the children of the families where every member, including the parents, is illiterate, children are most likely to drop out of the education system after
completing higher secondary school. This is equally true for both sons as well as daughters.

8. Fathers’ occupation also is a determinant of children’s access to higher education. The higher the occupational status of father greater are the children’s chances of acquiring higher education and especially chances of studying occupationally more potent stream of science. Children of fathers in manual occupations have very limited chances of acquiring higher education while children of fathers in non-manual occupations have very few chances of dropping out of the education system after higher secondary stage. Children of fathers in manual occupation have practically no chances of acquiring professional graduation. This is true in the case of both men and women. This study also found that father’s being in manual occupation is more detrimental to a daughter’s chances of acquiring higher education than those of sons’. The children of manual fathers have very few chances of studying science stream and the children of non-manual fathers have three times greater chances of studying this stream. While the sons of manual fathers have some chances of studying science daughters of such fathers have practically no chances of studying science.

9. Like fathers’ occupational status mothers’ occupational status also affects children’s access to higher education. Mothers’ being in non-manual occupation greatly enhances the children’s chances of acquiring higher education. However, mothers’ being in manual occupation reduces a daughter’s chances of acquiring higher education, especially of the professional kind, to a greater extent than that of a son’s. However, chances of studying science are more dependent on fathers’ occupational status than that on mothers in the case of both sons and daughters.

10. As in the case of education, it is not just the occupational status of the parents on which the chances of acquiring higher education depend but even on the occupational status of any other member of the family whose occupational status in the family is the highest. Thus the children of families wherein all the members are employed only in manual occupations have very few chances of acquiring higher education, especially of the professional type and to study science stream while as children of families wherein all the members are employed in only non-manual occupations have very few chances of discontinuing education just after higher secondary stage. These children are most likely to study science and acquire professional higher education.
11. Family income, not in absolute terms but, in terms of disposable income available per capita is also a determinant of access to higher education. While higher family income greatly enhances the chances of children acquiring higher education, somewhat lower income but assured does not reduce such chances very greatly. Lower income and even somewhat higher but un-assured greatly restricts such chances. Income has the same effect even on the chances of studying science stream. Low and un-assured income is more detrimental to a daughter’s chances of acquiring higher education than that of a son’s.

12. This study found that the stream of study and chances of acquiring higher education are also related. While among those who study arts at higher secondary stage largest proportion discontinue after this stage while among those who study science at this stage the smallest proportions discontinue and those who study commerce are in between. However, among those who study science proportion of women who discontinue after higher secondary is a bit larger than the corresponding proportion of men.

13. It has been found through this study that those who aim at higher levels of education attain higher than those who aim at somewhat lower levels. Again those who aim at higher occupational status generally acquire higher levels of education than those whose occupational aspirations are low.

Thus the study leads to the conclusion that opportunities for higher education are unequally distributed among the different sections of the society in the District of Lakhimpur. These findings are consistent with the findings of most of the studies, reviewed in Chapter 2 of this report. These results are consistent not only with the findings with regard to India but also to those of the other societies including the most developed ones of the USA and Western Europe. Thus a person’s access to higher education depends on the socio-economic background of the family to which the person belongs. Thus, the urban elite, upper caste Hindus in non-manual occupations and having higher incomes continue to dominate the scene of higher education in this district like other parts of this country and the weaker sections viz. the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Communities continue to lag far behind. Even the Muslims, especially those belonging to backward communities seem to suffer from the disadvantage in access to higher education. Women among these disadvantaged sections suffer the most.
Thus even after more than 60 years of independence the objective of equality, especially equality of opportunity in education and public employment, enshrined the Constitution, has not been realized and the weaker sections of the Indian society continue to remain weak despite the provision of special measures for them under the policy of protective discrimination.

5.2. IMPLICATIONS

Thus, while the constitutional provisions for establishment of a democratic republic with a socialistic pattern of society are lofty, the Indian state has failed to implement these provisions in the right spirit and perspective. Although to a large extent democratic political system has been put in place but democratizing the social system especially that of equalizing opportunities for higher education and public employment remain only a cherished dream.

The situation has serious implications for educational and employment policy framework. The provisions of reservation for weaker sections of SC’s, ST’s and OBC’ has resulted in the emergence of an elite class among them and they continue to corner all the benefits of the special provisions made for these communities and those families among them who remained in their traditional caste occupations and the landless labour continue to get exploited by the middle class from not only the upper castes but even by those from their own castes. This situation cannot be corrected unless the implementation of the reservation policy is recast. To exclude the creamy layer among the OBC’s from the benefits of reservation the government has fixed an income criteria of Rs 4,50,000/- per annum with a proposal to raise it to 6,00,000 (GOM Decision report in Times of India dated 16-03-2013) which again gives opportunities to the well to do among them to corner the benefits. In the case of SC’s and ST’s even this creamy layer is not excluded and as a result the elite among them continue to get the benefits to the exclusion of the poor, property less, landless and those employed in their traditional occupations from the benefits of the special Constitutional provisions.

This calls for a change in methodology of implementation of the policy of protective discrimination. Thus, as recommended by Mandal Commission (Backward Classes Commission 1980) the composite criterion of educational backwardness, social (occupational) backwardness and economic backwardness be used to select the
individuals and groups for the benefits of reservation or the formula proposed by Karpoori Thakur, viz. identification of weaker sections on the basis of caste and selection for actual benefits on the basis of class could also be used. The other way to prevent the elite among the disadvantages communities from cornering all the benefits of reservation would be the process of descheduling meaning the removal of castes/communities from the lists of beneficiaries if they have attained the educational, occupational and economic status at par with the advanced sections or General category. The third way could be to provide reservations for a maximum of two generations only for each family and letting them compete with non-reserved categories thereafter. Two generation’s reservation is proposed because those who enter the lowest rungs of non-manual occupations are sometimes likely to skid back into manual occupations and once the two generations are in non-manual occupations chances of skidding are almost eliminated except in the case of some kind of a catastrophe. Again, although education is a very important mechanism of social engineering, equal educational attainments do not lead to equal occupational placements. Therefore, equalising educational opportunities will not necessarily lead to elimination of inequalities in employment opportunities; it may not even reduce such inequalities significantly. But, using Raymond Boudon’s model of IEO – ISO (Boudon, 1974), equalizing social (Occupational) opportunities will significantly reduce the inequality of educational opportunities. This is so because once a person enters a non-manual occupation with a decent income he/she will ensure that his/her children acquire education of a certain type and level through which the children can continue to retain the non-manual occupational status. In this context it would not be out of place to suggest making right to work a fundamental right as this would ensure a certain minimum assured income for all.

To narrow the gap between the rural and urban populations in access to higher education and to the non-manual occupations two things seem to be essential. One, to provide higher levels of education and of good quality, institutions of higher education including of professional education need to be established in rural areas. This would also help reduce the gap between the rural men and women in participation in higher education, because in the absence of institutions of higher education near home women dropout from the system after passing out of the school as their parents hesitate sending them far away from home for higher education. Two,
rural industrialization, that is, industries for which raw material is available in the rural areas be established there and the local young people be provided training to work in such industry. It is also necessary to encourage these local young people to invest in these industries. Thus Agro-based industries, minerals and metal extraction industries could be established in rural areas with the rural populations manning them. This would generate gainful employment for them and as a result create demand for not only higher education but for education in general and generate the resources to fund this education as well.

One important reason for rural poverty is the problem of marketing their products, be it agro-based products or handicrafts as the middlemen exploit the producers. To change this situation the state could help organize cooperative societies in rural areas which could undertake the marketing of their products and also make arrangements for financing the production units. This will help generate an assured income which would help families to send their children for not only school education but also to higher education. Use of better technology to increase the production of crops could help the farmers raise their income which in turn could facilitate the education of their children.

Besides, as of now higher education continues to be highly subsidized and this stage of education being accessible mainly to the elite, the benefit of the subsidy goes only to those who can afford to pay for it. A policy of differential fee structure would solve this problem. This implies that no subsidy is provided for those who can afford to pay for it and they be asked to fully finance the higher education of their children while making it absolutely free for the poorest and partly free for those who can afford to bear a part of the cost. This would reduce the burden on the state who could as a result spend more and on larger number of the children whose families cannot afford to pay for their higher education.

It is also pertinent here that despite subsidizing higher education and subsidy being provided mainly in tuition fee there are other private costs such as on clothing, transport, books and stationary and other personal needs of the students which the poor families cannot afford. Therefore it would be necessary to provide book banks, free transport and larger amounts of financial assistances to the needy to reduce the burden of private costs on their families so that they could continue to acquire higher levels of quality education.
5.3. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As has been said in the Introduction to this report, this study is delimited to the district Lakhimpur and that a sample of only those persons who passed higher secondary examinations in 2005 was examined to study the inequalities in access to higher education. As a result of these restrictions the study suffers from some limitations. Thus the career of the higher secondary school graduates was studied only for five years after their leaving school and as a result those who do not continue beyond this stage immediately but do so after a break could not be included. Similarly a sample from only one district which does not have much variety in economy as the place is not industrialized and the major occupation of the people is agriculture, small business or state government service and as such the effect of industrialization on people’s participation in higher education could not be studied. Similarly the population under study is more or less culturally uniform, the only difference being in their prophesying different religions, the effect of cultural traditions on the access to education could not be studied. Again, India as country being known for its diversity examination of a sample from one district gives only a glimpse, but not the deeper insights, of the social, political and economic process operating in the society and as such the generalizations arrived at in this study may have limited applicability for the country as a whole, nay, even for the one state of Assam of which the district under study is a part.

To overcome these limitations it is suggested that a larger sample from more districts be examined and the studies be replicated in several regions which are economically, socially and culturally diverse and the results of these studies be compared. Such an exercise can help in arriving at generalisable causes of inequalities in access to higher education which in turn can help in formulating comprehensive and effective policies to equalize the educational opportunities. To understand the process of inequalities in access to higher education more widely the precise extent of effect of each determining variable could not be delineated. Therefore it is suggested that some studies using the techniques of sophisticated statistics may be made so that the relative weight of each determinant of inequalities in access to higher education could be assessed. Besides, the school graduates’ careers need to study for much longer periods than five years, say at least ten years to understand the relations between education and occupation also.